



(U) Baghdad : Perceptions & Fact

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(C) What do you picture when you hear the term "green zone" in reference to the area in Baghdad where the Iraqi Provisional Government was headquartered and the US Embassy is now? Chances are the picture is of extreme security, mortar and rocket craters, and everyone running from place to place to keep from being shot. Well, according to [REDACTED], the former and recently returned NCR, Baghdad, that isn't quite accurate.

(U) Sure, all the Americans are carrying weapons and wearing body armor. Of course, there are fences, two perimeters just like here at NSA, but there are apartment buildings where Iraqis live and restaurants, too. It isn't downtown Annapolis but it isn't the Wild West, either.

(U) [REDACTED] says that those traveling to Iraq generally have one of two perceptions. Either they assume it will be just like any other TDY - land at the airport and catch a cab to the base. Or, they imagine running between car and building, building and building in a crouched position like the guys in the movie "Saving Private Ryan". In fact, it is really somewhere in between. It is true that immediately upon leaving Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) one is under the watchful eye of the US Military and an NSA provided Security Detail and that traveling in two vehicle convoys is a requirement. But, more and more the atmosphere is getting to be like the former vs. the latter.

(U) It is also true that rockets and mortars are fired at the green zone but these "attacks" are a means of harassment, purely a terrorist's tactic. These haphazard "attacks" more often than not, end up adding another pockmark to the façade of the Sheraton Hotel, which is across the Tigris River from the green zone.

(U) When asked how things changed while he was there (6 February - 1 June) [REDACTED] quickly said that it was the conditions within the palace that housed the NCR and the Coalition Provisional Authority that changed the most.

(U) In February, when [REDACTED] arrived, the place still looked like it was in a war zone. It was very dirty. There were scads of quickly strung communications wires hanging from the ceiling, everywhere. But, as the time for the State Department to take over came nearer the palace began looking more like an embassy. [REDACTED] recalls seeing those large floor buffers, familiar to most military people, being used on the marble floors to bring back the shine. Also, the closer the date for the handover of power to the Iraqi Interim Government came the obvious presence of the US Occupation forces lessened.

(U) Rubbing elbows with members of the foreign service with global reputations was amazing. Mixing and cooperating with members of our sister intelligence agencies was another highlight. But, by far the most fulfilling and gratifying experience for [REDACTED] as witnessing, first-hand, the difference SIGINT makes on a daily basis in Iraq.

Photo is of [REDACTED] with a tank he happened upon. The custom is for the tank driver to name his tank and put that name on the barrel of the gun. This unknown tank driver may have had a job here at one time!

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